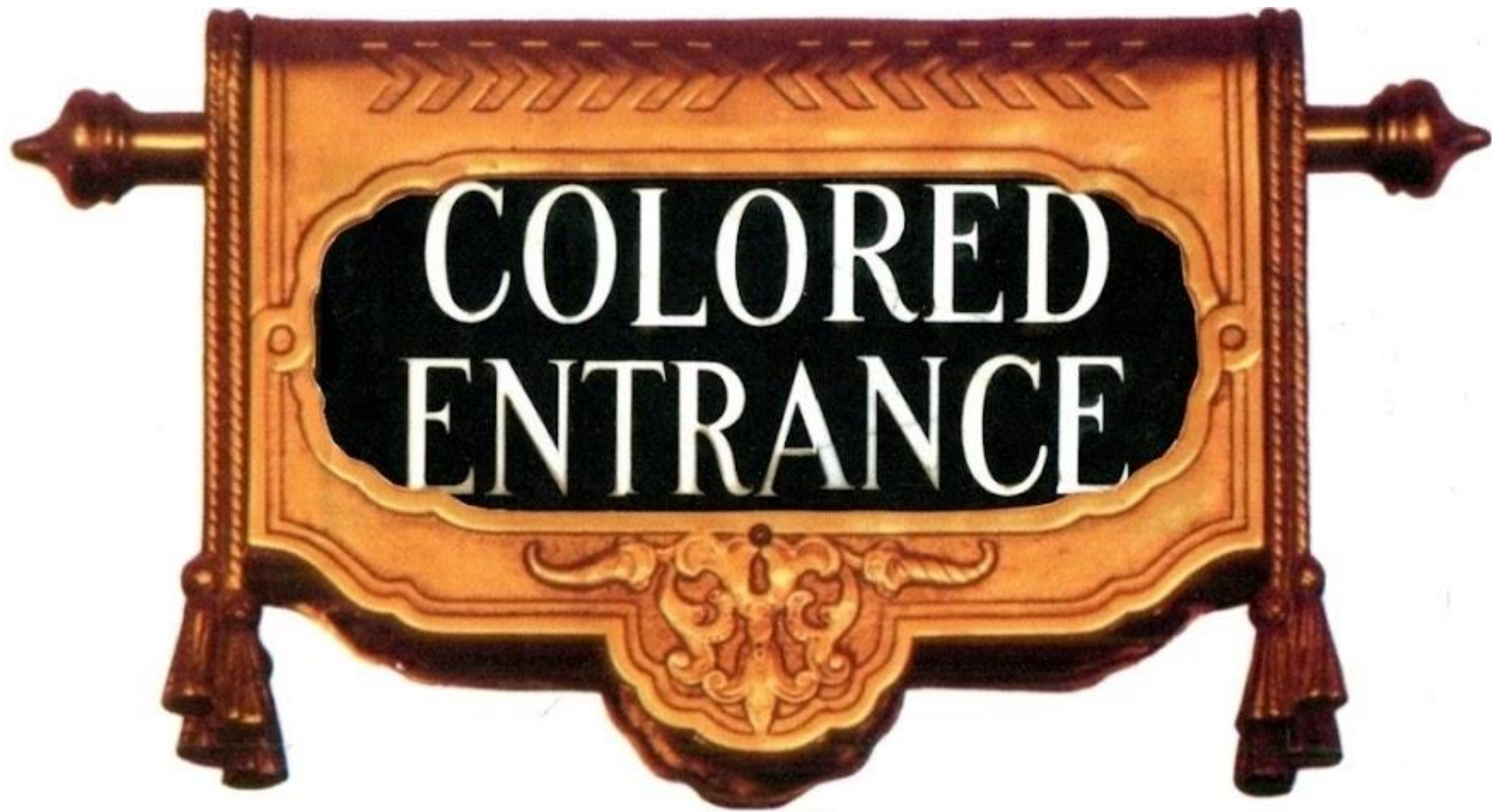




**The Metropolitan Opera and The Atlanta Fox:
a Love Story.**

(c) Bob Foreman

For two decades, the annual spring tour of the New York Metropolitan Opera played the Atlanta Fox Theatre. In 1961, the opera company was used as a lever to force the desegregation of the Fox. That story and others are told here.

TO ENABLE HYPERLINKS AND TO ENLARGE IMAGES, DOWNLOAD FILE AS PDF.

The Met first played its spring tour in Atlanta in 1910 and would continue to do so for the better part of eighty seasons.

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PAPER

THE ATLANTA CONSTITUTION

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VOL XLII—No. 322

ATLANTA, GA., TUESDAY MORNING, MAY 3, 1910. —TWENTY PAGES.

PRICE FIVE CENTS

BRILLIANT SUCCESS CROWNS GRAND OPERA OPENING

LOCAL OPTION AND O'NEAL WIN ALABAMA FIGHT

Mallory, the State-Wide Pro-
hibition Candidate for Gov-
ernor, Badly Beaten.

BANKHEAD RETURNED TO THE U. S. SENATE

The Antis Seem to Have Swept
the Field and It Is Said the
Result Means That the Pres-
ent State-Wide Law Will Be
Greatly Modified by the Next
Legislature.

Montgomery, Ala., May 2.—Emmett
A. O'Neal, leader of the fight against
the recent proposed amendment to put
prohibition in the legislation of Ala-
bama, defeated H. B. Mallory, of Selma,
a supporter of the amendment, by a
majority of between 24,000 and 25,000
for governor in the democratic primar-
ies held in Alabama today.

United States Senator John H. Bank-
head received a vote which will proba-
bly equal the combined vote of his two
opponents, John B. Knox and Frank R.
White, and is assured of a new term in
the senate.

The claim is made tonight that the
majority of the delegates to the state
convention, which meets on May 17,
will stand for local option, and will in-
sist on a modification of the present
state-wide prohibition laws. It is also
claimed that a majority of the state

VIEW OF THE INTERIOR OF THE AUDITORIUM ON FIRST NIGHT



Photo by Abenanza Studio.

How the great audience, gathered to hear "Lohengrin" sung by world-famous stars, looked from the stage of the Auditorium.

PRAY FOR US 5 MINUTES A WEEK
AND PREY ON US REST OF WEEK

COL. L. P. THOMAS
TAKEN BY DEATH

RECORD CROWD ON FIRST NIGHT OF GRAND OPERA

Hundreds of Out-of-Town Peo-
ple Are Here for Big
Musical Event.

\$60,000 TICKETS SOLD
AT END OF FIRST DAY

Financial Success of the Occa-
sion Is Now Assured, This
Sale Covering All the Expens-
es Incurred—Great Majority
of Audience of First Night
Arrives on Time.

GLAD TO REACH CITY.

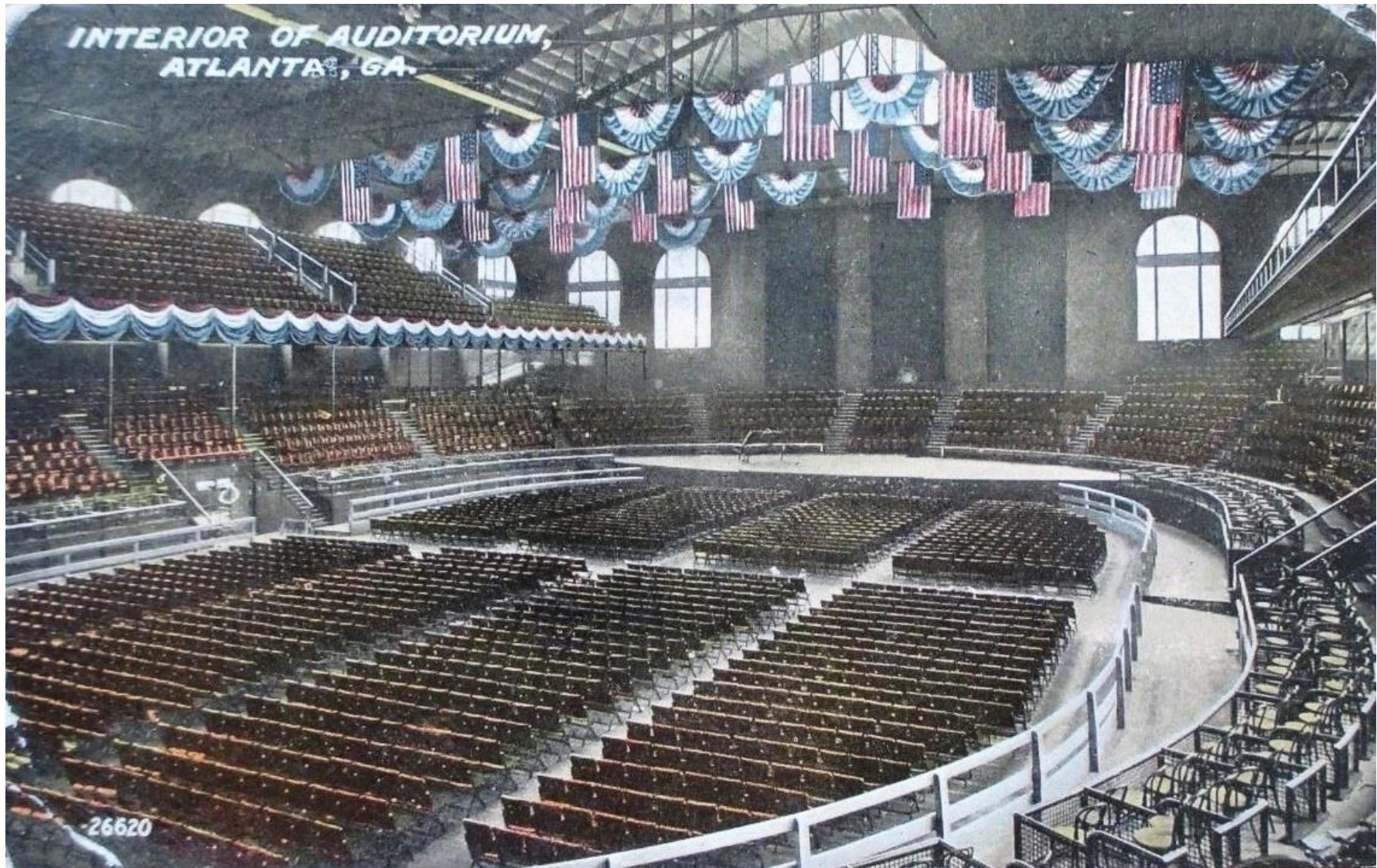
SAYS ENRICO CARUSO

"I am glad to arrive in At-
lanta," said Caruso, the great
tenor, on his arrival here last
night. "I have heard much of
the city and am glad to have
an opportunity to see for my-
self."

The grand opera star was
very tired by his long trip and
hurried to the Piedmont, where
he had secured quarters some
time ago. He will sing in
"Aida" on Wednesday night.

Greeted by one of the largest and
most brilliant audiences that ever as-
sembled on any occasion in Atlanta or
the south, the Metropolitan Opera
Company, of New York, opened the
week of grand opera with the presen-
tation of Wagner's inspiring opera

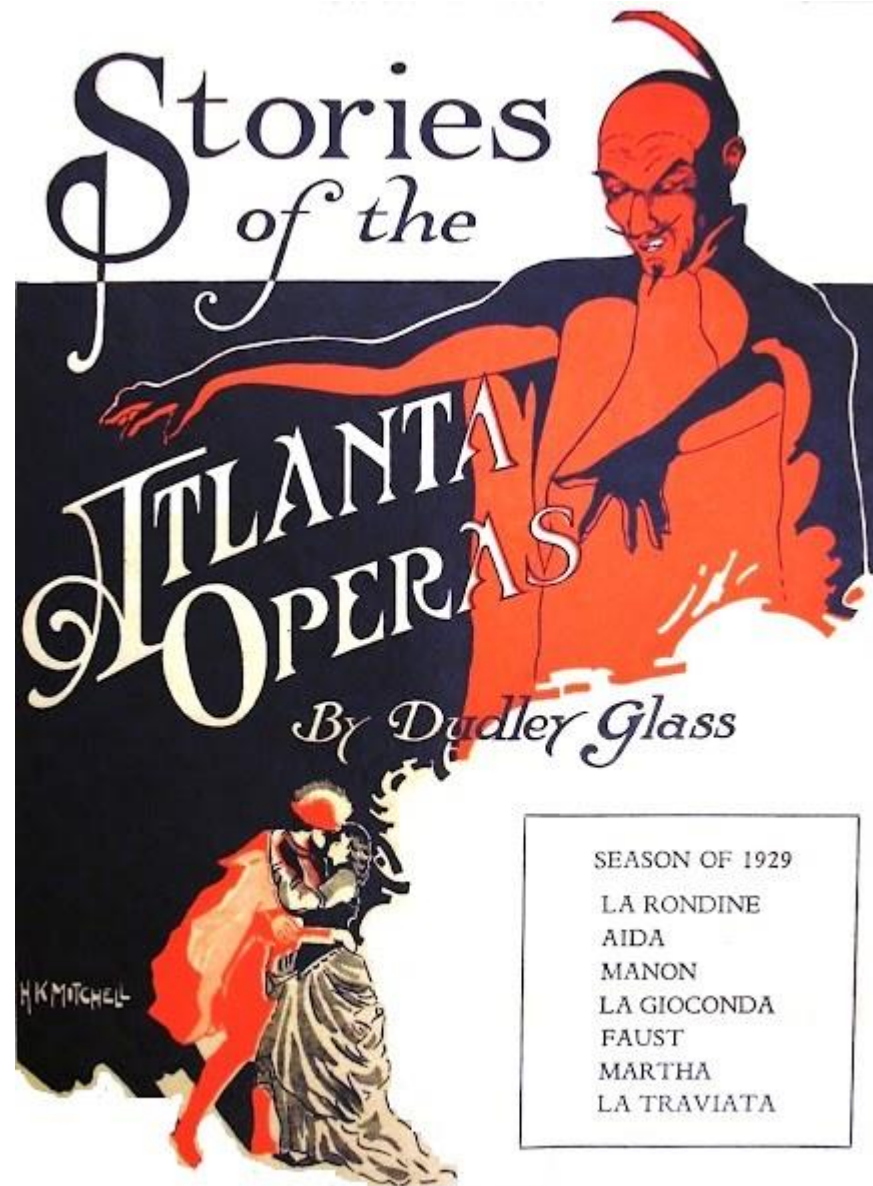
For the first thirty years, the Met played the downtown Municipal Auditorium, which was designed to be an arena. Before they would play, the Met required the construction of a stage house, built and equipped to their specifications.



The principal singers stayed not downtown, but at the first midtown hotel, the Georgian Terrace, across Peachtree from where the Fox Theatre would be constructed sixteen years later. On the hotel portico in 1913 are the bon vivants Enrico Caruso (smoking), Geraldine Farrar, and Antonio Scotti (far right and also smoking).

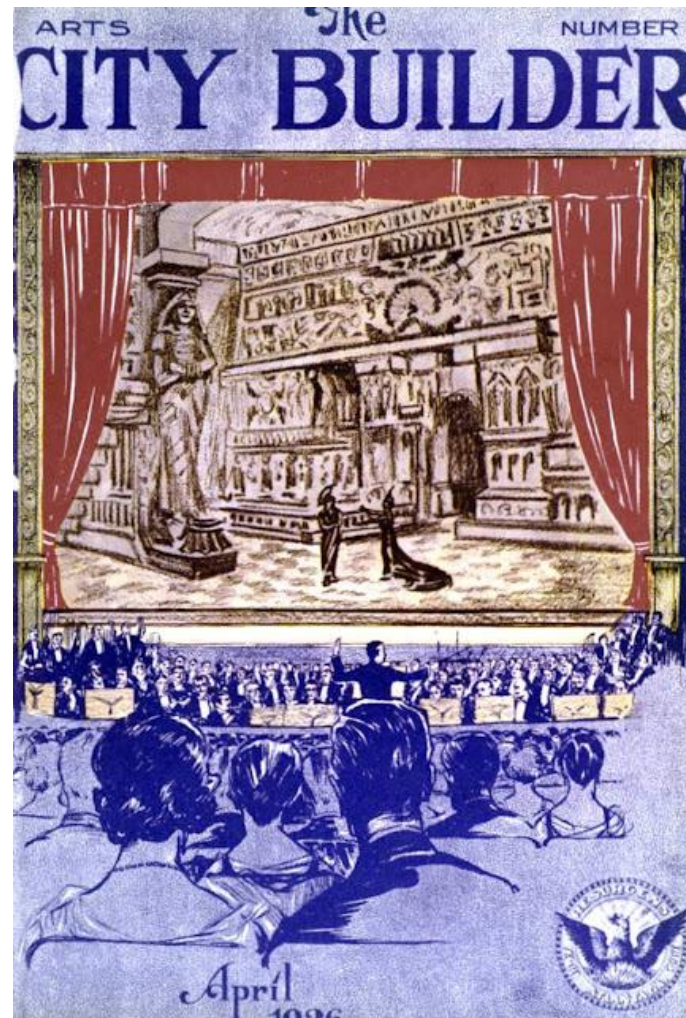


The singers became the pets of Atlanta Society in a frenzy of receptions, dances, and dinners held in their honor at the Capital City and Piedmont Driving Clubs. Even the works of music themselves became proprietary, as evidenced in the title of this book, authored by the dramatic critic for the Atlanta Georgian.



PRICE 25 CENTS
NINTH ANNUAL EDITION

The Met played the Municipal Auditorium from 1910 to 1917; 1919 to 1930; and 1939 to 1942. Below, a romanticized rendering of Opera at the Auditorium from the *City Builder*, house organ for the Chamber of Commerce.



In 1947, the Met first played the Fox, which the Met chose over the Auditorium.

SPORTS
RADIO—MARKETS

The Atlanta Journal

"COVERS DIXIE LIKE THE DEW"

SECOND
NEWS SECTION

VOL. LXIV, NO. 337

ATLANTA (2), GA., SUNDAY MORNING, JANUARY 26, 1947

PRICE FIFTEEN CENTS

Metropolitan Opera Returning In April for 3 Gala Performances

Full Retinue of Top Stars Will Appear at Fox Theater

By WILLIAM KEY

Atlantians of a bygone generation will momentarily recapture their lost youth when the Metropolitan Opera Company once more comes here this spring to touch off two days of brilliance and gaiety of a type and degree generated by no other event in local entertainment history.

With a full retinue of its most gifted and colorful talent preparing for its Atlanta appearance, the Met directors Saturday were reported completing plans for three full-panoplied performances here April 28-29.

The Fox theater will be the setting for the 1947 visit to Atlanta, and the program, as announced by the revived Atlanta Music Festival Assn., bids fair to be the cream of the crop of Metropolitan repertoire for a two-day appearance.

On Monday night, April 28, Mozart's "Marriage of Figaro" will open the abbreviated season, to be followed by a matinee of Puccini's "Madame Butterfly" on Tuesday, and Verdi's "Aida" Tuesday evening, April 29.

Junior League Assisting

Coincident with the announcement that Atlanta again will hear this traditional trio of opera's most beloved works, word also comes of reorganization and renaissance of the Atlanta Music Festival Association, prime mover in pioneering operatic music for Atlanta as far back as 1910, when gala music was sought to signalize and glorify the opening of Atlanta's then-new City Auditorium.

The Junior League of Atlanta is assisting the festival association in presentation of the revived season.

Jackson P. Dick is president of the Atlanta Music Festival Asso-

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ WALLY BOREN DISCOVERS COLUMBUS, GA.

! Wally Boren, the breezy conductor of "Wally's Wagon," a regular feature of This Week, the national magazine distributed weekly by The Atlanta Journal, has discovered that Columbus did not sail up the Chattahoochee river to the town in Muscogee county of his name. Wally, in the current This Week feature, on Page 12, also discovers that while coffee beans grow by the billions in Brazil, folks at Columbus think of peanuts in thousand-ton lots. Among other discoveries of which he writes are barbecued spare-ribs, the Columbus kind, the product of a specially bred short-rib pig.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

here virtually held their breath for the announcement whether Caruso or Martinelli would tug at their heart-strings with their "Pagliacci" magnificence. Time was when the vast darkness of the Municipal Auditorium almost literally vibrated with the sobs of an audience listening to the des-

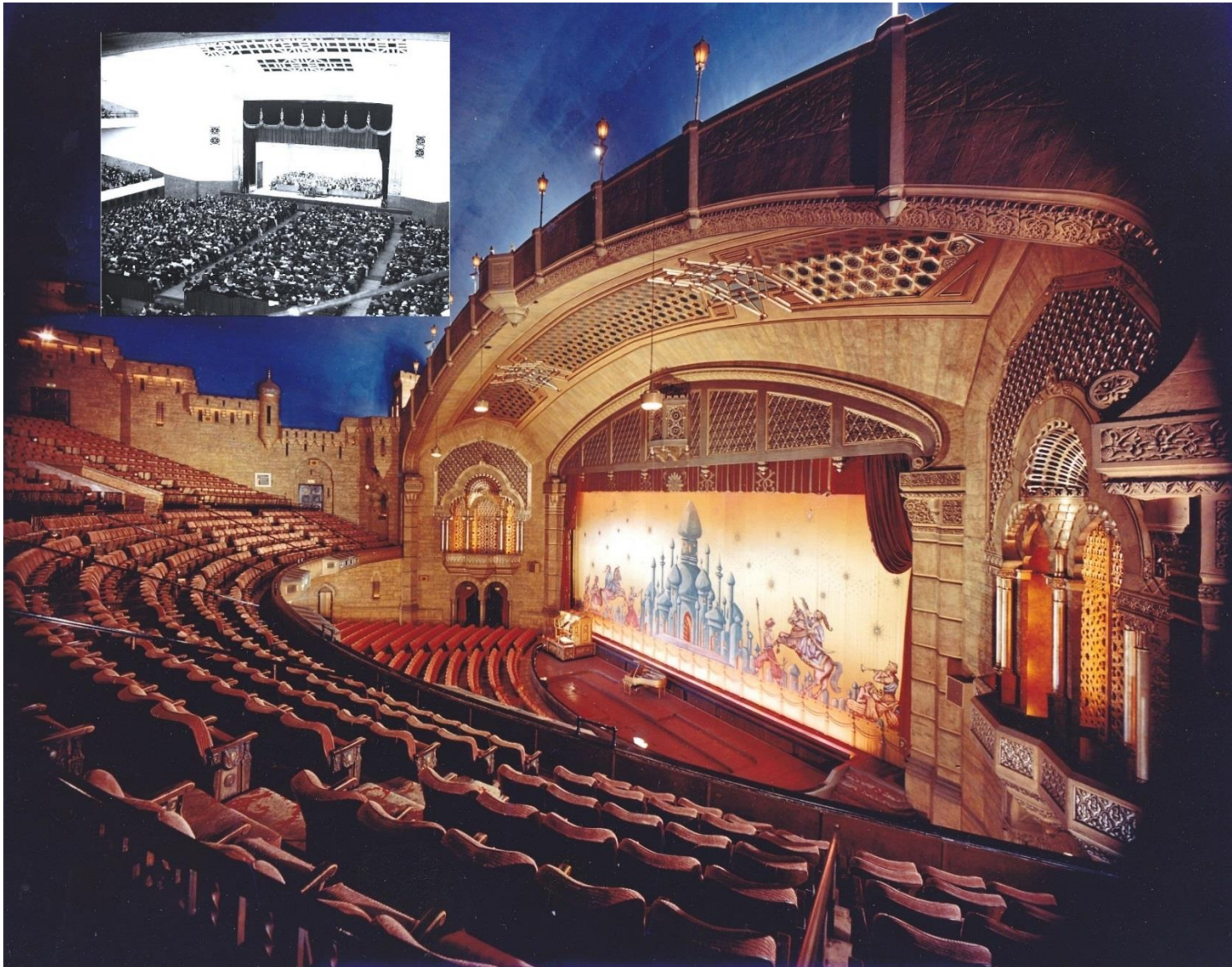


DUST OFF YOUR TOPPERS, THE MET'S COMING BACK

Jackson Dick (left) president of the Atlanta Musical Festival Assn. which is sponsoring the return of Metropolitan Grand Opera to Atlanta, Mrs. Hugh Dorsey Jr., president of the Atlanta Junior League, which is assisting in sponsoring

the Met's return, and Tucker Wayne, chairman of the information committee on the Opera season, look at a picture of the group of music lovers who first brought grand opera to Atlanta.—Journal Photo.

The Fox was a super-deluxe Movie Palace, then showing first run pictures, while the "improved" Auditorium (inset) was a WPA barn, unattractive and un-air-conditioned. Bill Jenkins, who controlled the Fox, was on the local opera presenting board, and the Met was the only stage attraction he permitted to play there, at a sizable loss of revenue to the theatre.



The Fox (which after 1933 never presented anything but pictures) presented Fortune Gallo's company in 1940, the first opera to play the Fox. The opera house that Gallo built in New York is now known as Studio 54.

ATLANTA JOURNAL 2/04/1940

FOX Theater **Tues. SEATS NOW!** **Wed.**

Seats Selling at Fox and Paramount Box Offices

Direct from triumphs at Rockefeller Center, New York City
Featuring Leading Artists From Metropolitan, Chicago Civic and Leading European Opera Houses.



TUESDAY EVE., FEB. 6 AT 8:00

"AIDA"

Spectacular Egyptian Opera, with
Nerina Greco, Aroldo Lindi, Ly-
uba Senderowna, Mestyn Thomas.

WED. MAT., FEB. 7 AT 3 P. M.

"MADAME BUTTERFLY"

Puccini's Japanese Opera, with
Hizi Koyke, Francis Perulli,
Marie Valle, Charlotte Bruno.

WEDNES. EVE., FEB. 7 AT 8:00

"CARMEN"

Dashing Spanish Opera, with
Coe Glade, Sydney Rayner, Harold
Kravitt, Leola Turner.

Augmented SAN CARLO ORCHESTRA, Carlo Peroni, Conducting
SAN CARLO CORPS DE BALLET

Lydia Arlova, premiere danseuse, Lucien Pridoux, premier danseur
PRICES—Eve. Orch.: \$2.20, \$1.65, \$1.10. Loges: \$2.20; First Dress Circle,
\$1.65, \$1.10, 83c; Second Dress Circle and Gallery, 85c. Matinee, Orch.:
\$1.65, \$1.10, 83c; Loges, \$1.65; First Dress Circle, \$1.10, 83c, 85c; Second
Dress Circle and Gallery, 85c, Tax included.

The 1946 world premiere of "Song of the South," with Walt Disney himself in attendance, warmed the stage.

ATLANTA JOURNAL 11/12/1946

WORLD PREMIERE
TONITE - 8:30
DOORS OPEN AT 7:30 P. M.

*Filled with the warmth,
gaiety and laughter
of the Old South!*

Walt Disney's
FIRST LIVE-ACTION MUSICAL DRAMA!
**SONG
OF THE
SOUTH**
IN TECHNICOLOR!

including animated tales of
UNCLE REMUS
with
RUTH WARRICK and LUCILE WATSON
HATTIE MCDANIEL • JAMES BASKETT
LUANA PATTEN • BOBBY DRISCOLL

★ IN PERSON ★
• WALT DISNEY
• RUTH WARRICK
• BILL WILLIAMS
• BARBARA HALE
• LUANA PATTEN
• BOBBY DRISCOLL
• DONALD DUCK
(Clarinet Solo)
• SNOW WHITE
(Ad-libs, Credits)
• PLUTO and GOOFY
(Vocal Chorus)
• AND •
THE NATIONAL RADIO SHOW
"VOX POP!"
PARKS JOHNSON
and WARREN HULL

FOX
THE SOUTH'S FINEST

DISTRIBUTED BY
REG RADIO PICTURES

The Fox will be closed today in preparation for premiere
starting tomorrow—the regular run of
"SONG OF THE SOUTH"

SUPER SUNNY SONGS!
"How Do You Do"
"Everybody's Got a Laughing Place"
"Summer On Lake"
"Zip-A-Dee-Do-Do"
"Uncle Remus Song"
"Song of the South"

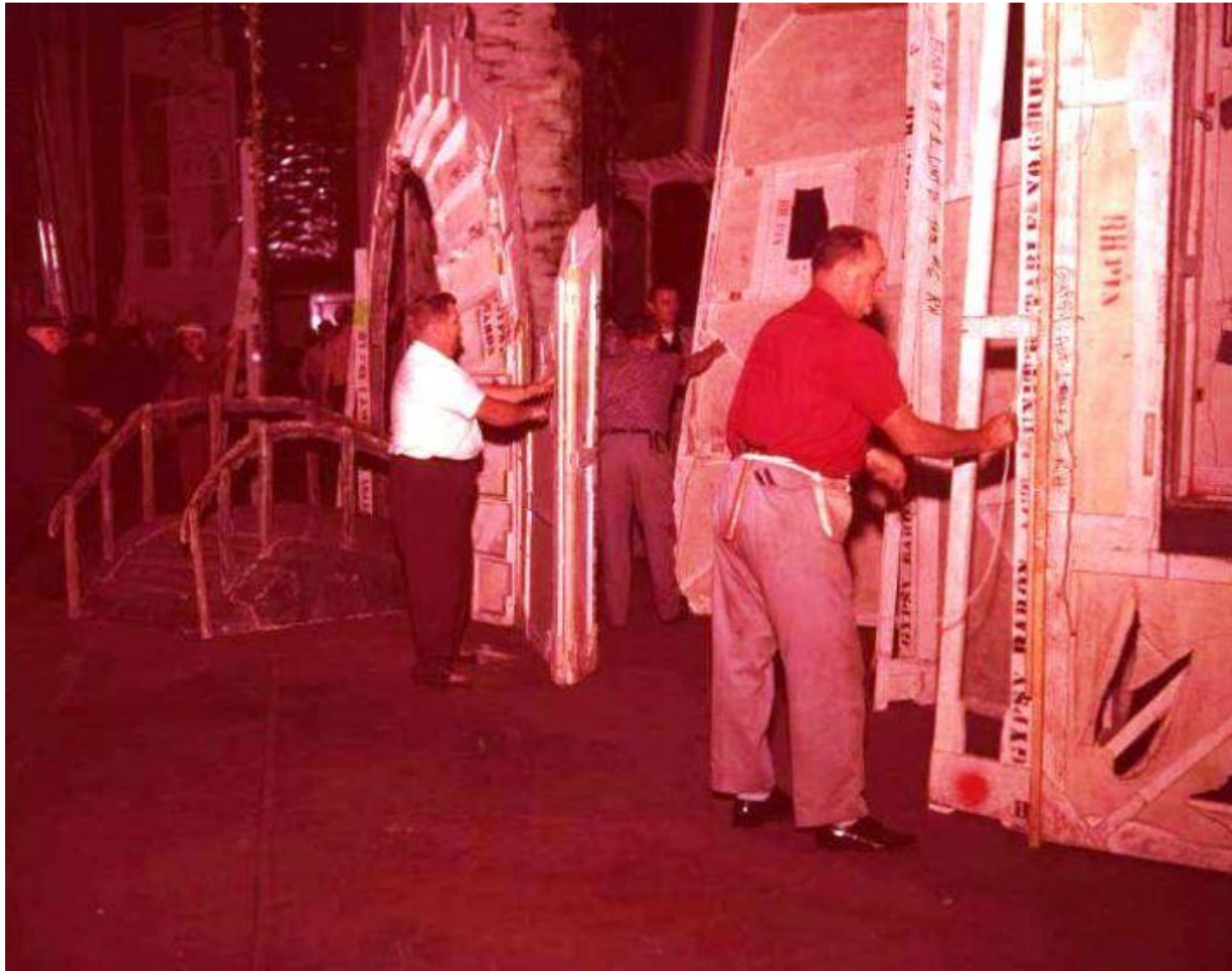
To term the Met's spring jaunt "a tour" would be a misnomer in the current usage of the word. Shutting down their home base for the duration, the entire company of FIVE HUNDRED, including all the stars, trouped to select (mainly eastern) cities, with the complete New York season's repertoire of sixteen operas, from which each presenting town made their choice. The Met tour was super-colossal, above Barnum and Bailey in magnitude, and thus a rightful fit for the super-deluxe Fox.



At its peak, the tour required two fifteen-car special trains to transport the company, which included a hundred-piece orchestra, ninety choristers, forty ballerinas, and all the Manhattan stagehands and artistic personnel. The company disembarked at the now long-gone Terminal Station, located to east of the present Omni Hotel.



To tote the physical production, 27 seventy-foot box cars were necessary, unloaded from a siding (now the Beltline) at the corner of 10th and Monroe, so that the sixty-foot wide rolled drops could be transferred wrinkle-free to trucks, for the nightly change of scenery. Local 41 IATSE union stagehands Frank Dey, Jr. (left) and Bob Spradlin lash the set together in 1960.



Organized chaos reigned backstage where the majority of the company did not speak English. Chalkings in large letters on the basement walls read "39th St." (stage right) and "40th St." (stage left) to correspond to the New York house. Here a singer on Atlanta's downstage 40th Street prepares to enter. Note the Peter Clark "cut rope" sign.



Stars who played the Fox included Helen Traubel, Lauritz Melchior, Eleanor Steber, Dorothy Kirsten, Blanche Thebom, Ezio Pinza, Rise Stevens, Jerome Hines, Robert Merrill, Geraldine Farrar, Cyril Ritchard, Roberta Peters, James McCracken, Patrice Munsel, Leonard Warren, Richard Tucker, Sherrill Milnes, Joan Sutherland, Anna Moffo, Renato Tebaldi, Birgit Nilsson, Teresa Stratas, and John Reardon. The local press bent over backwards to cover the annual soiree, with scores of human interest stories as well as (always-glowing) reviews.



Met Opens Its Opera Season in Atlanta Monday... Pages 6 and 7

"I wish Toscanini was here to play 'Dixie!'" cried out-going Met General Manager Edward Johnson upon receiving a Confederate flag from Atlanta Mayor Hartsfield in 1950. Johnson presided over the first four Fox seasons.

ATLANTA CONSTITUTION 4/27/1950

FROM SOUTH CANADA

Retiring Met Manager First Honorary Rebel

Edward Johnson, retiring manager of the Metropolitan Opera Association, had the music, all right, but when they handed him that Confederate Flag, he professed to be without words.

Mayor Hartsfield gave the silver-haired Met manager three gifts on behalf of the Atlanta Music Festival Association at half-time festivities during "Faust" yesterday afternoon.

The first was honorary membership in the Confederacy on account of Johnson's from South Canada. The second was a genuine Confederate bond which the Mayor advised him to hold onto "because if this spending keeps up in Washington sooner or later a Confederate bond will be worth as much as any other Government bond." And the third was a City of Atlanta bond "good for cash money any where in the land."

With the other gifts the Mayor tucked in a Confederate flag, which Johnson waved enthusiastically crying, "I wish Toscanini were here to play 'Dixie!'"



Johnson was in charge when two events caught national attention. Late trains delayed the 1948 "Carmen" curtain for two hours, and the cast had to play the show in street clothes, to the delight of the crowd.

ATLANTA JOURNAL 4/02/1948



HECTIC HEROINE OF BACKSTAGE 'CARMEN'

Little Jennie Cervini, her hair up in curlers, is real heroine of the Met's "Carmen" performance as she directs men bringing in the wardrobe trunks backstage. Mistress of the Wardrobe Cervini worked

the daylight out of about 20 stage hands as she shuffled the trunks around and dug out the costumes for the cast the moment the garments arrived.—Journal Photo by Jack Young.

The next season "handsome" Met tenor John Garriss was murdered down by the train yards, in a crime never solved.

ATLANTA JOURNAL 4/21/1949

Met Tenor Slain In Alley Here

Detectives Flying To Question Cast

By HUGH PARK and WILLIAM KEY

One of the most bizarre murders in Atlanta's history rang down the curtain on the 1949 Metropolitan Opera season here Thursday morning.

At 7:45 a. m. John Garriss, handsome tenor whose voice thrilled thousands here Monday and Tuesday evenings, was found shot to death in a dreary Marietta st. alley.

Atlanta police immediately began a major investigation on the theory that the slaying was an "inside job."

Detectives were flown in a special plane to Memphis to intercept the special train which early Thursday morning took the Metropolitan Opera cast to that city for an engagement.

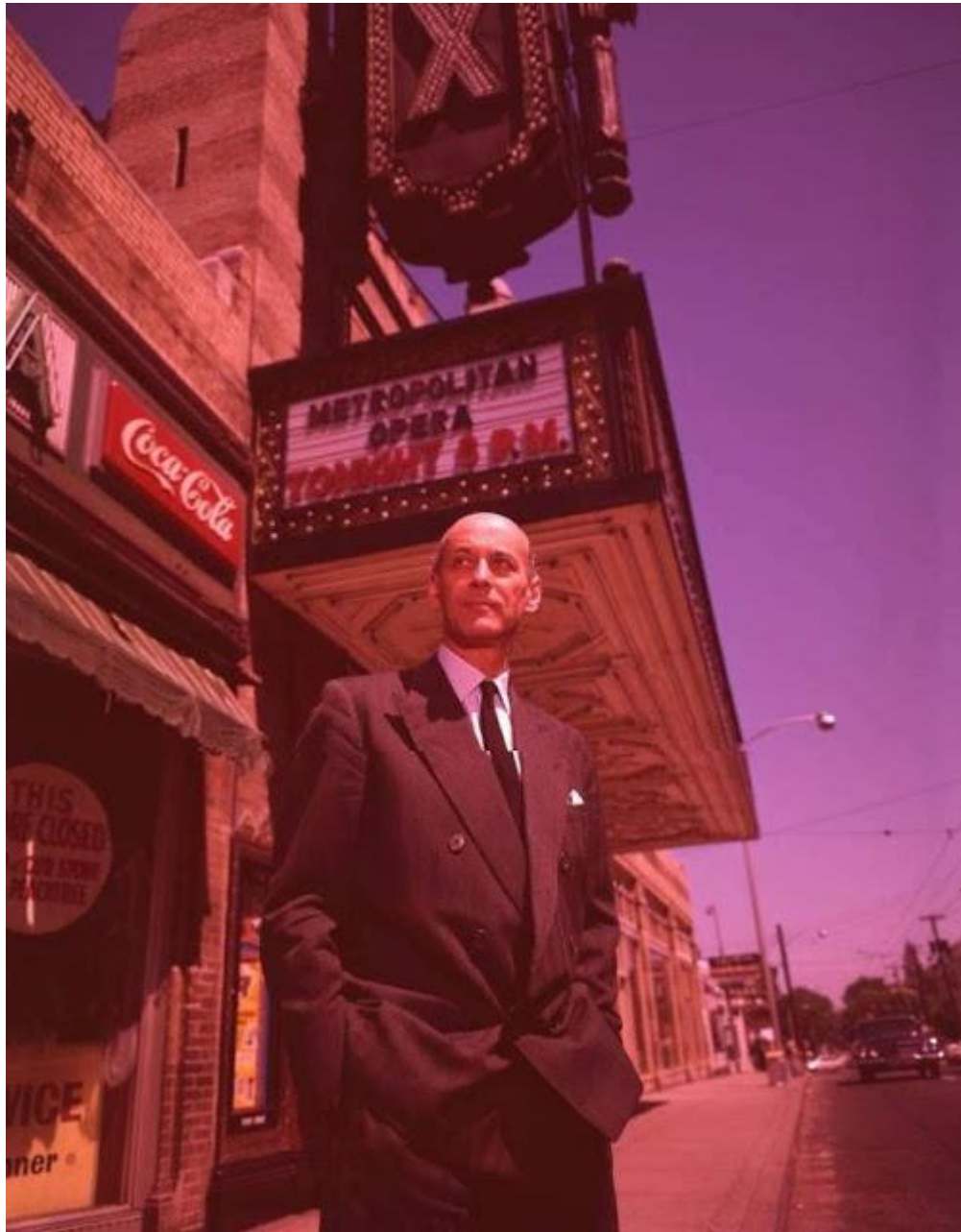
Garriss' body was discovered by a Negro workman who was "cutting through" the alleyway on his way to work.

The opera tenor had been shot once in the region of his heart, the 38-caliber bullet entering almost directly below the left armpit.



JOHN GARRISS
In Role of Cassio

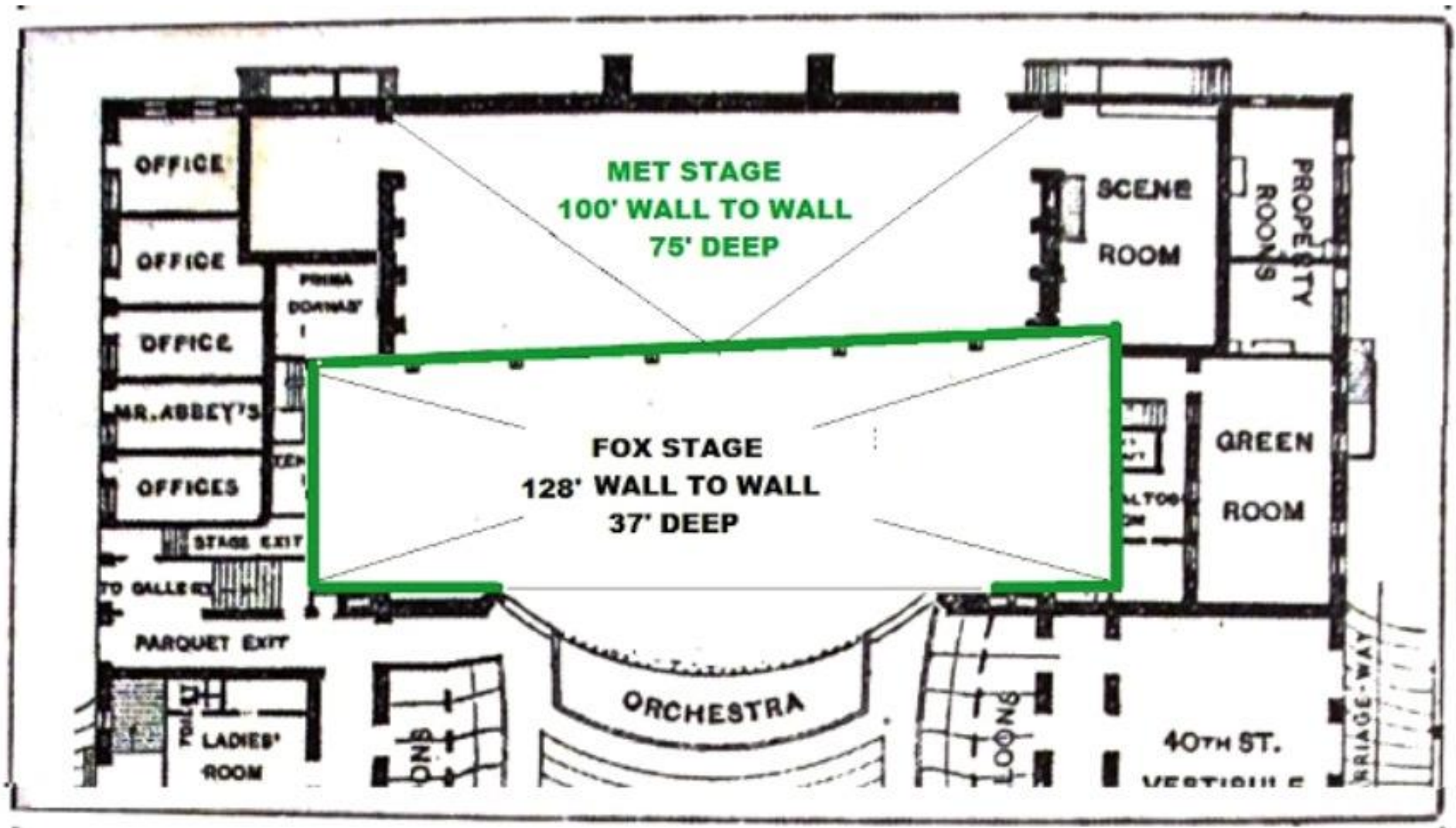
The Met General Manager best remembered in Atlanta (and everywhere else) was Mister Opera himself, the Austrian-born Rudolf Bing, or as he once instructed an Atlanta man, "Call me Mister Bing."



"Never have I known a place" [like Atlanta, said Bing in his book] "to become so excited about opera. Work stopped, sleep stopped, all over the town while the Metropolitan was there. For years, Atlanta paid us a fraction of what our performances cost us to give, because the Board... would not authorize me to demand a higher fee from such nice people." Bing backstage at the Fox in 1960:



Bing's only misgiving about the tour was the shallowness of the stages they played, "but [the Fox, he continued] had style, grace, and good acoustics," and it was right across the street from his hotel. "We had to prepare special inexpensive 'tour sets,' painted drops that could be hung on the wretched stages we played." Here, superimposed above a plan view of the old Met stage, is the Fox stage.



The depth problem was compounded after the 1953 installation of a Cinemascope picture sheet, set on a 74' by 28' curved steel frame which had to be hauled to the back wall and winched up out of harm's way, for the run of the opera. Dotted lines at center (below) show the relative size of the original sheet, which was flat and could fly straight up.

ATLANTA CONSTITUTION 9/27/1953

20th Century-Fox presents **The Robe** in **CINEMASCOPE**
TECHNICOLOR

The Greatest Story of Love, Faith and Overwhelming Spectacle!

about CINEMASCOPE

No. 1 shows how the flat ordinary screen is dwarfed by the newly created curved Miracle Mirror Screen.

Nos. 2, 3, 4 show how CinemaScope's superior new Stereophonic Sound enhances the scope of audience participation.

No. 5 shows how the new Anamorphic Lens creates infinite depth and life-like reality to engulf you in the action on the screen.

about The Robe

The supreme novel of our time as it was meant to be seen, heard, lived! The Miracle Story "reaching out" to encompass you in its awe-inspiring spectacle and breathtaking grandeur.

20th Century-Fox presents A CinemaScope Production **The Robe** starring RICHARD BURTON • JEAN SIMMONS • VICTOR MATURE • MICHAEL RENNIE

Produced by **FRANK ROSS**

with Jay Robinson • Dean Jagger • Torin Thatcher • Richard Boone • Betta St. John • Jeff Morrow • Ernest Thesiger • Dawn Addams • Leon Askin

Screen Play by PHILIP DUNNE • From the Novel by LLOYD C. DOUGLAS • Adaptation by Gina Kaus

Directed by **HENRY KOSTER**

Beginning Friday Features Start at:—
11:30 - 1:57 - 4:23 - 6:45 - 9:15 P.M.

The Fabulous

FOX

PRICES: (GOV. TAX INCL.)
UNTIL 5 P.M. \$1.25
AFTER 5 P.M. \$1.50
CHILDREN .50

ALL SOUTHEASTERN PREMIERE!
THURSDAY NIGHT
 7:00 AND 9:15 P.M.
 NO SEATS RESERVED
 TICKETS ON SALE THURSDAY 1 P.M.

While Bing (right) was feared and respected, the man most adored by Atlanta Society was Bing's second, Francis Robinson. He was Kentucky born and had graduated from Vanderbilt, so for him Atlanta was like going home again.



In 1910, a group of wealthy Atlanta men had formed the Atlanta Music Festival Association, which acted as local presenter and guarantor against possible shortfalls in ticket revenue. In the depression year 1930, for instance, they had to cough up seventy-five percent of the Met's fee. Jackson Dick was the Festival head during the Fox years, shown here in 1953 greeting stars Jean Madeira (left) and Roberta Peters at the train station.

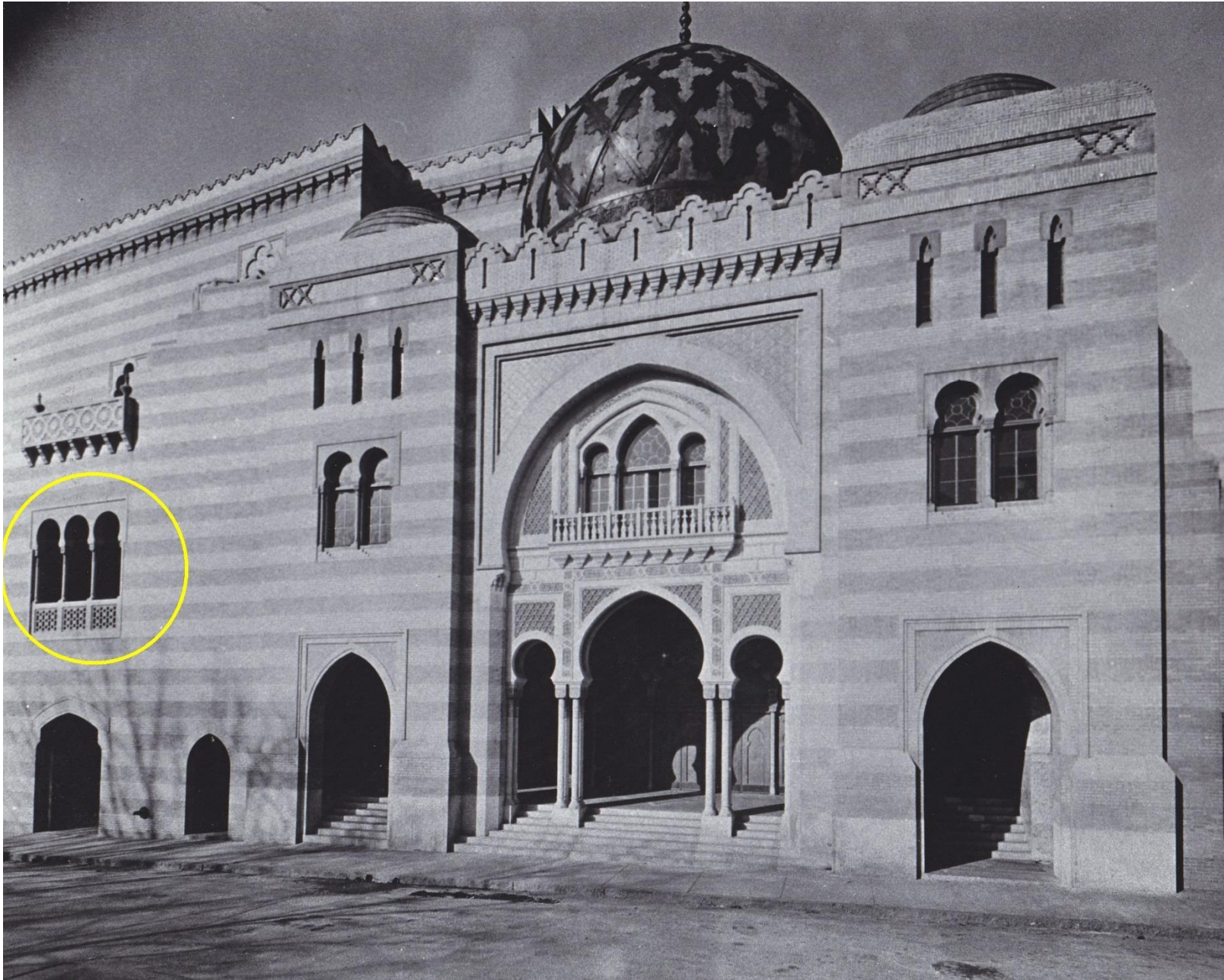
ATLANTA JOURNAL 5/01/1953



The prime mover behind bringing the Opera to the Fox was Mrs. James H. Frazer of the Junior League, that exclusive and restricted social club which contained The Five Hundred most influential and well-to-do Atlanta Ladies. Frazer contacted Metropolitan Board member and Atlanta socialite Mrs. Harold Cooledge, and she in turn contacted the Met and the dormant Festival. A deal was struck that made everybody happy, and the Fox was adopted by the Junior League, the Ladies shown at the keyhole door in the Lower Ladies Lounge.



By special arrangement, the secret open-air smoking balcony (yellow circle) off of the Upper Ladies Lounge was opened only once a year, for the run of the Opera.



The Festival men would continue to act as guarantors, and the League agreed to publicize the attractions, sell the tickets, and publish the souvenir program book, receiving as a donation the advertising revenues, about \$25,000 a year in current figures. All of the Atlanta players, including the author's mom (center right) were volunteers.



The best Junior League souvenir book cover was illustrated by John Kollock for the pivotal 1961 season.



No shame was attached to vanity program ads which promoted neither Jaguars nor Kroger's.



Mr. and Mrs. McKee Nunnally and daughter Marty posing in Mr. Nunnally's new Jaguar Model XK120, World's Finest Sports Car

IMPORT MOTORS, LTD.

375 SPRING STREET, N.W.

ATLANTA, GA.



Photo by Fay Baine Colby
From left to right: Mrs. Perry Ballard, Jr., James Porter, Jr., Mrs. James Porter, Perry Ballard III, Mrs. Perrin Nicolson III.

The author's uncle Alex Hitz and wife Caroline, Junior League President and soon to become Mrs. Robert Shaw.

ATLANTA CONSTITUTION 5/11/1968



Patrons were entitled to purchase a pair of season tickets on the condition that they paid to the Festival the sizable annual fee of five bucks (about \$70 in 2017) which would guarantee their seating location in perpetuity. The Fox seated 1500 more than the Met in New York, including fifty standing room, shown below returning from intermission.



By the fifth year (1951), sell-out seasons become the rule and by 1954 (below) the Junior Leaguers were swamped. Fortunately, there were servants at home to do the housework.

ATLANTA JOURNAL 3/15/1954



Staff Photo—Van Tool

JUNIOR LEAGUERS FILL PHONE AND MAIL ORDERS FOR OPERA TICKETS

From Left: Mrs. Schwab, Miss McDuffie, Mrs. Furniss, Mrs. Chambers

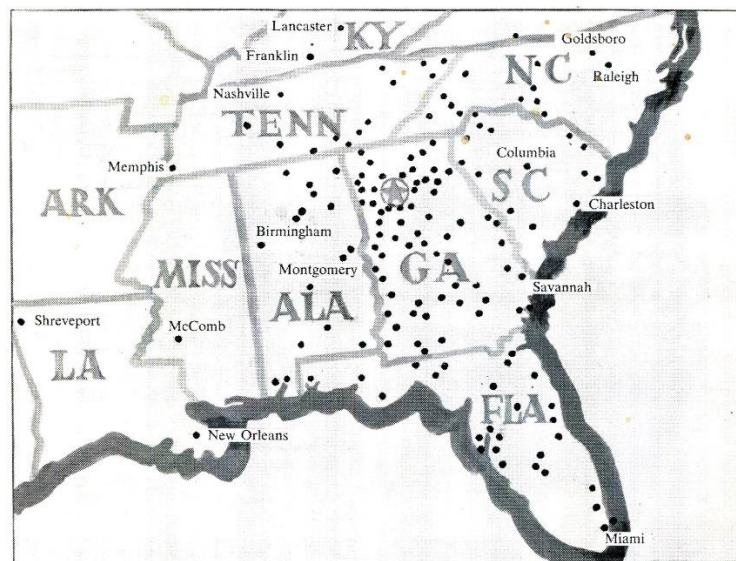
BOXOFFICE OVERWHELMED

Met Opera Tickets Sold Out In Few Hours of First Sale Day

Mrs. Harold Cooledge and Rudolf Bing, in Atlanta's first sell-out season and his first with the Met, at the Fox front doors.



Patrons from out of town flocked the Fox, as shown in this 1962 Junior League chart.



Cautiously, only three operas were presented in the first seasons, but as the demand for tickets increased yearly, more play dates were added, so that by 1960 the Met played a full week of eight different operas. As this program book title page indicates, what they came for was Opera, and which opera they saw was of small consequence.

**METROPOLITAN OPERA
ASSOCIATION, INC.**

PRESENTS

Opera

at the Fox Theatre in Atlanta

By the Entire Company from the
METROPOLITAN OPERA HOUSE, NEW YORK

Under the auspices of the Atlanta Music Festival Association, Inc.
In cooperation with the Atlanta Junior League



Some patrons, it was said, had their lawyers revise their wills to pass onto their children the coveted season tickets. But whether they attended the Saturday matinee with their heirs in tow---



or attended all seven all nights, as some did---



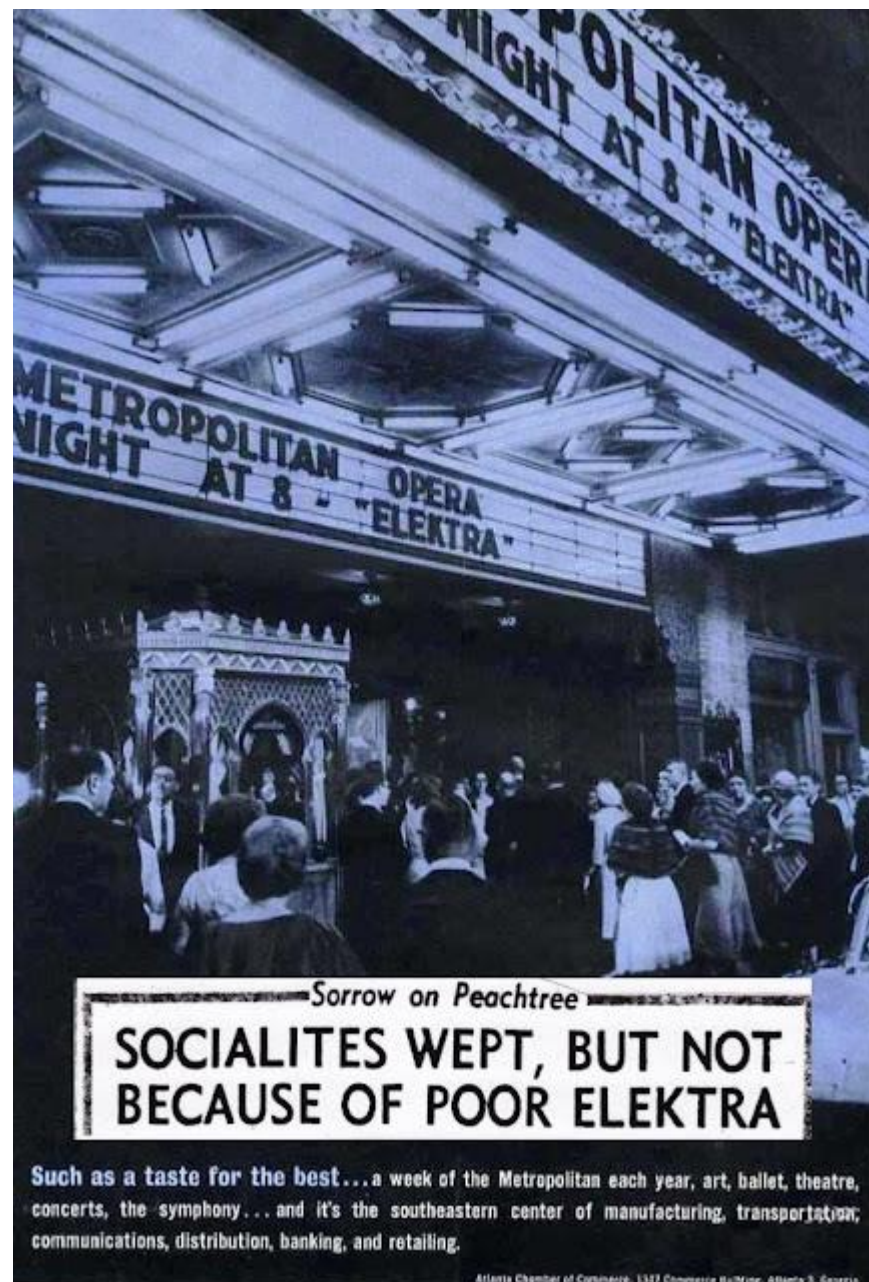
-- the Met in Atlanta was first and last a social occasion of the highest order, causing even the most sedate matrons to run, not walk, to the box office.



For many, the intermission was the best part.



In the 1962 season, the Met committed the fatal error of presenting an intermissionless opera. Atlanta Journal Society editor Edith Hills Coogler summarized the catastrophe in her next day's postmortem (inset).



The stage attractions were top notch, and even with the reduced settings, they were spectacles of great majesty, wonderful to behold. 30,000 patrons attended the opera each season.



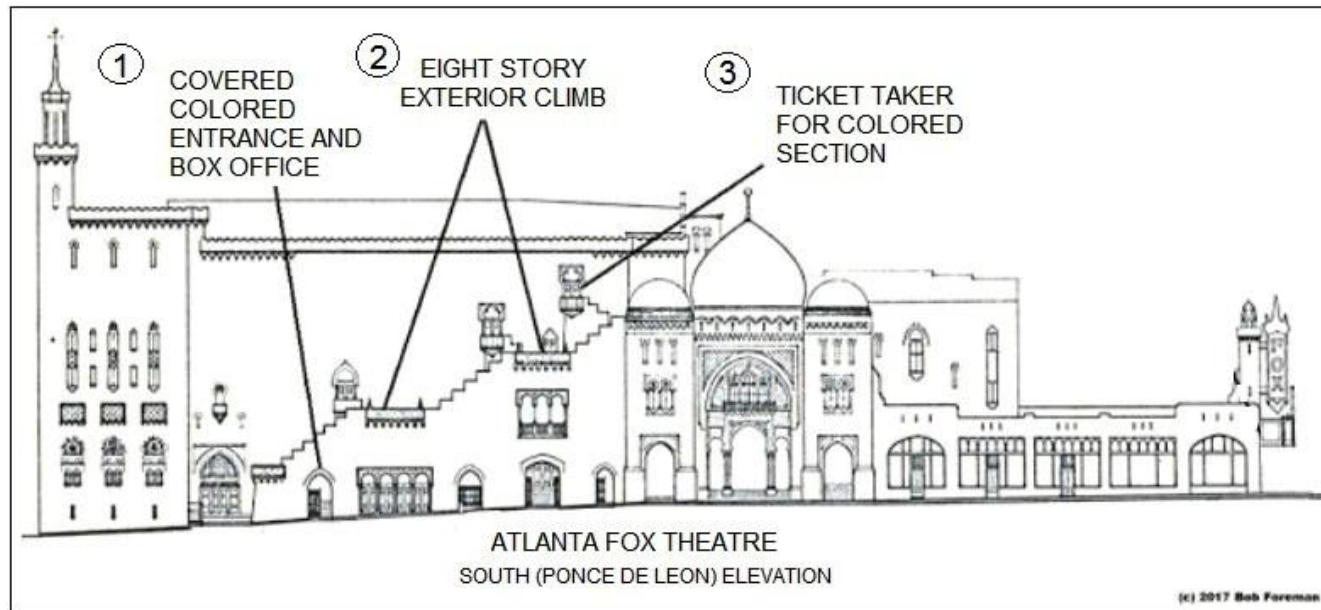
But all was not well in paradise, as the May 1961 inset shows. The incident occurred at the performance of "Nabucco" (Nebuchadnezzar in English), the season closer.



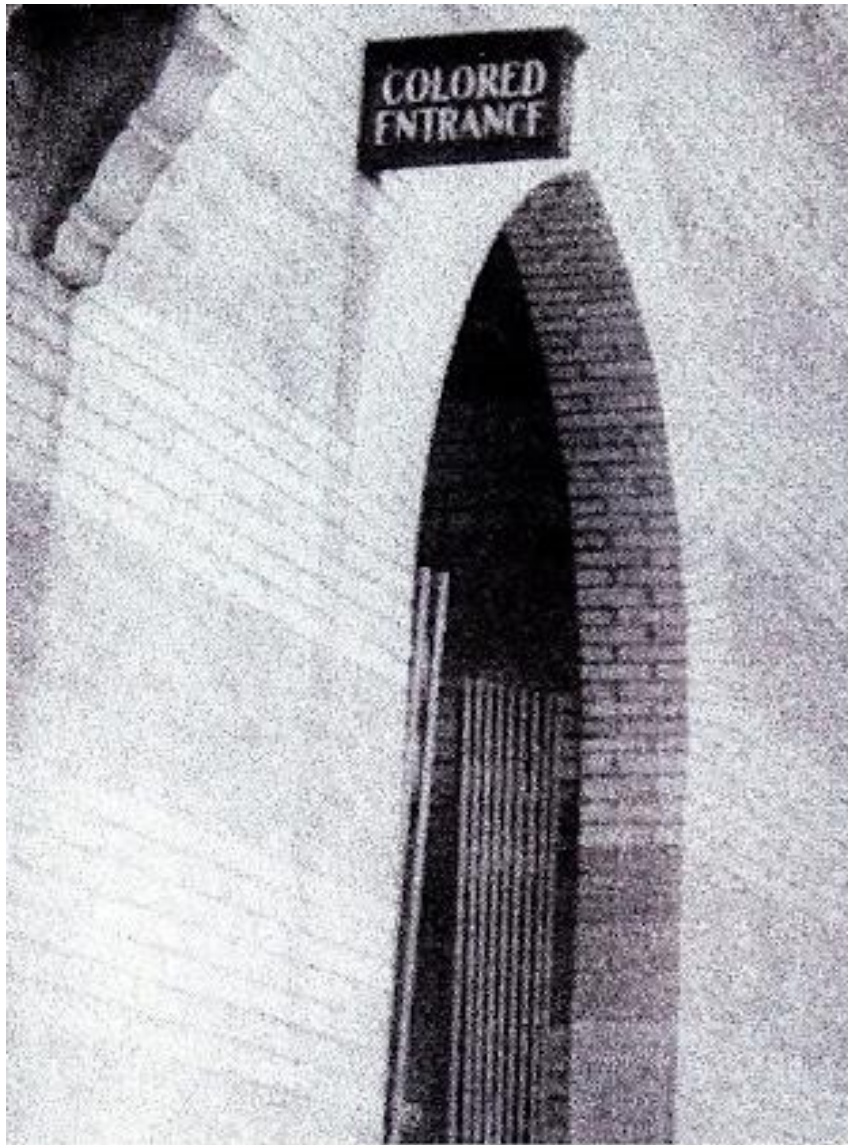
From opening day on Christmas 1929, the Atlanta Fox Theatre was a house segregated by race and, as mandated by custom, as well as by State and local laws, there was a separate entrance for “the colored.”



Black people entered at (1) and purchased their tickets. They then climbed an exterior stair (2) to reach the 188-seat gallery (3). White people entered from Peachtree Street.



Located next to the Stage Entrance, the "colored entrance," shown then and now, with the ticket window beneath a covered archway, and the uncovered stairway beyond.

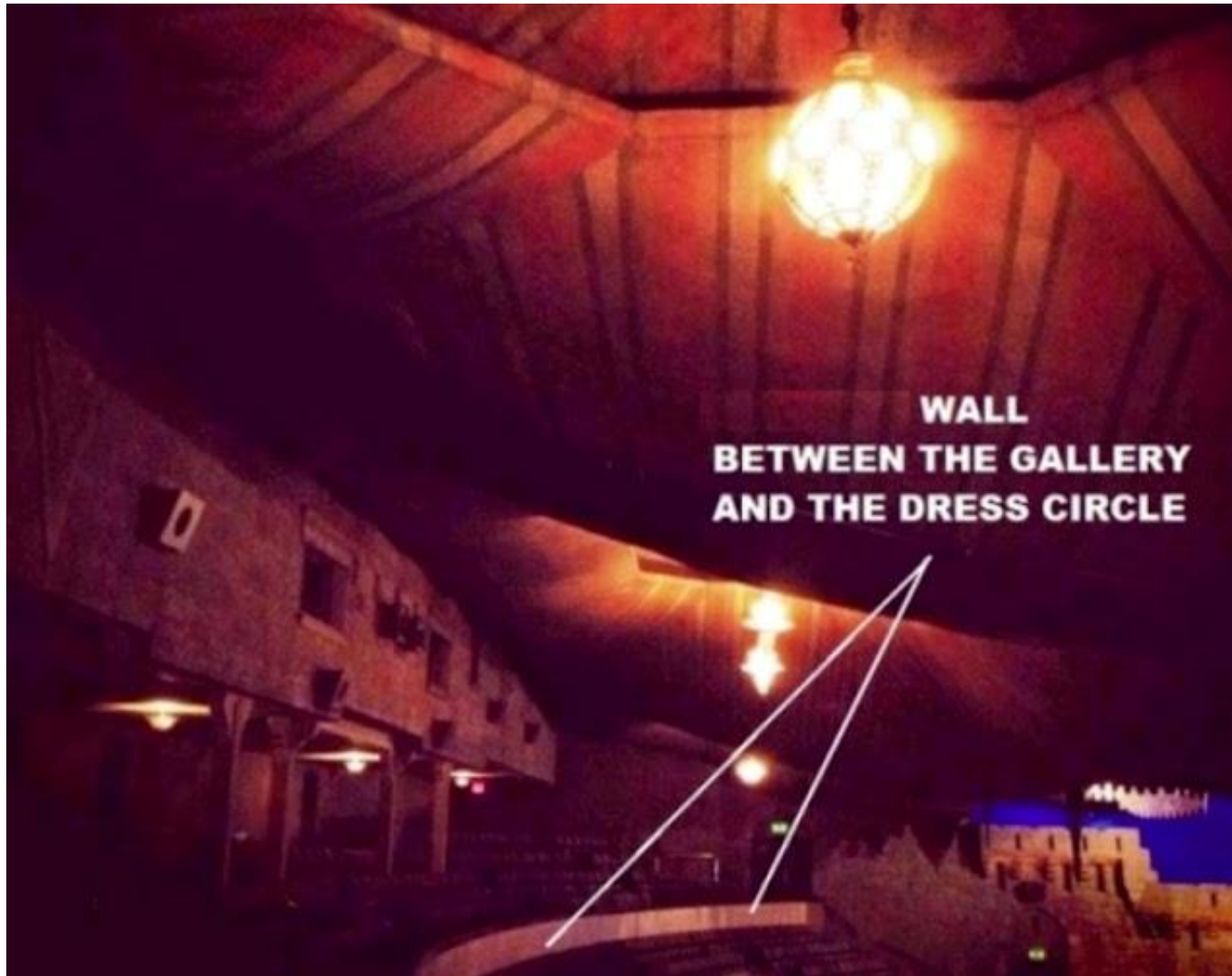


The Colored Entrance sign can be seen to the far left in this 1941 shot.

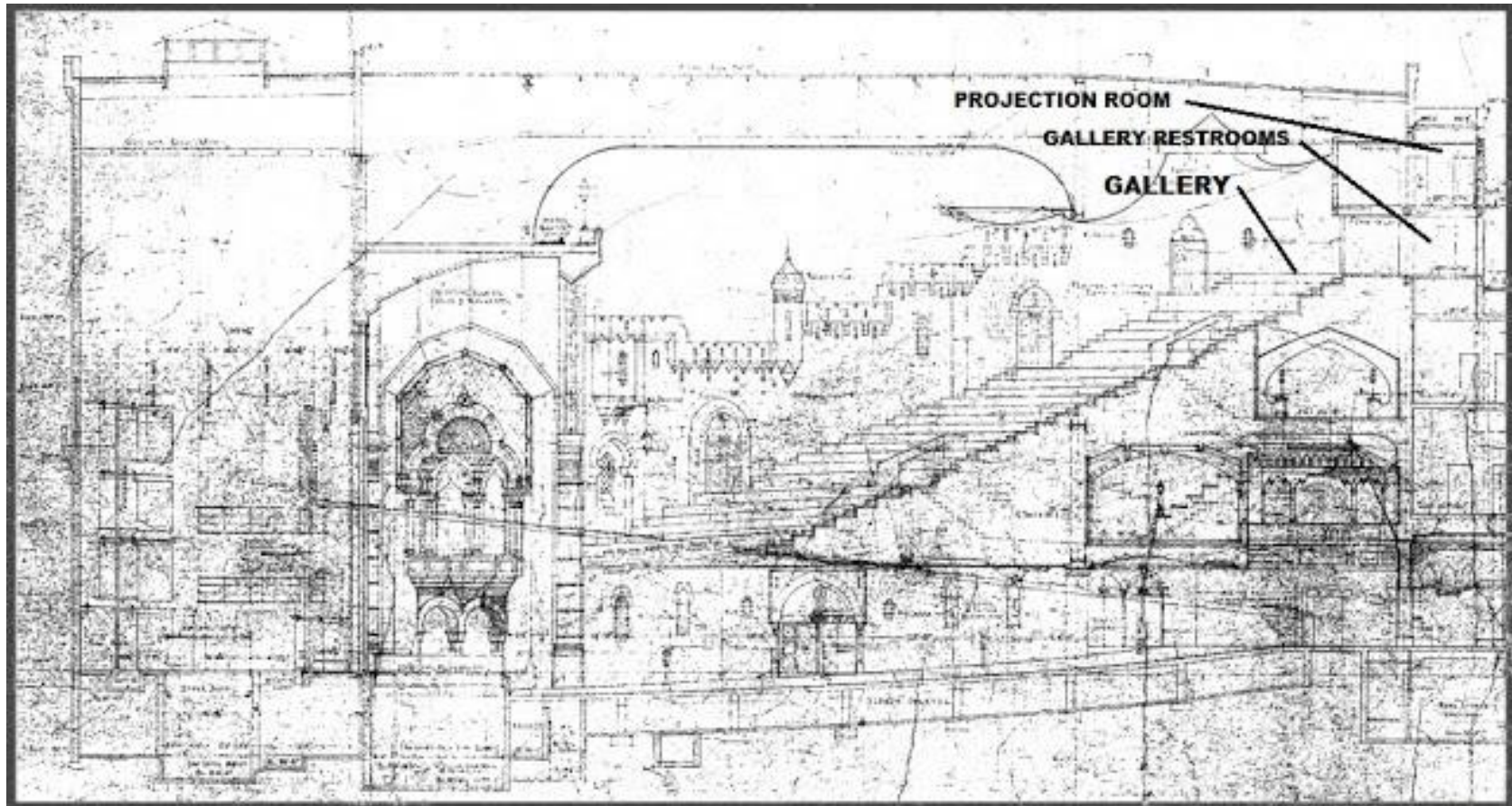


COLORED
ENTRANCE

The Gallery was physically separated from the Dress Circle by a continuous three-foot-high cement knee-wall with no openings. Thus the white projectionists, having no access to the passenger elevators (for whites only), had to carry heavy film canisters up the nine floors to the booth.



The Gallery had its own pair of toilets for the negroes.



In Atlanta of the day, theatres designated "colored" were listed in newspapers beneath all white facilities.

ATLANTA JOURNAL 5/16/1960

Out-of-Town Theaters

ALPHARETTA DI (Alpharetta)—Never So Few, Frank Sinatra.
BELMONT HILLS (Carmichael)—The Gazebo, Deb. Reynolds, Glenn Ford.
CORB (Marietta)—Academy Award Actress Simone Signoret in Room at the Top. At 2, 4, 6, 8:10, 10:15.
83 FAYE, D.I. — Blue Denim and Flying Fontaines.
MOUNTAIN (Stone Mountain)—Operation Petticoat. Gary Grant.

Beaches

LAKE SPIVEY—Three miles east of Jonesboro, 10 a.m.-10 p.m.
TANNER'S BEACH—Drive Campbellton Road to Carrollton.

Roller Skating

ROLLERDROME—Mon. through Sat., 7-10 p.m. Sat. afternoon, 2:30-5 p.m.
625 Penn Ave. at Ponce de Leon.

Golf Range

P'TREE GOLF RANGE — Rear 2143 P'tree Rd. PGA Pro Hank Donchevaky.
PUTT PUTT OLF COURSE — 3291 Glenwood Rd. (Glenwood Springs), 2145 Cheshire Bridge Rd. (Just off Piedmont), DeLowe Dr. (Campbellton Plaza Shopping Center), 2801 Hwy. 54 (Forest Park).

Ice Skating

BELVEDERE ICE SKATING RINK—Open all week, 2939 Midway Road. Amusements.

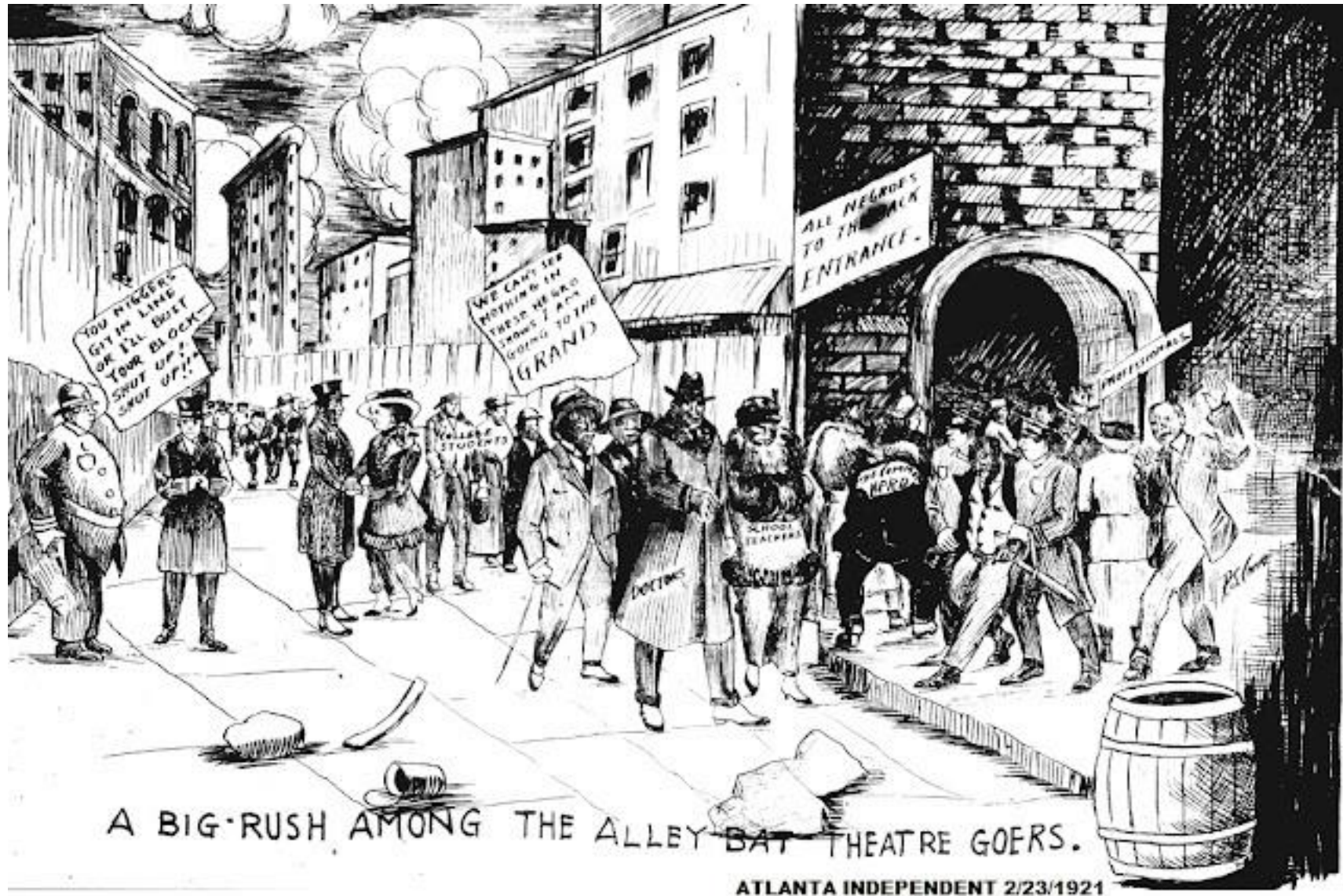
Colored Theaters

ASHBY—Jack the Ripper and Battle of Coral Seas.
CARVER—Ride a Crooked Trail, Audie Murphy, The Last Voyage.
81—Ride a Crooked Trail and The Last Voyage, Robt Stack.
FORREST—Mr. Rock and Roll and Thunder Over Arizona.
8172—Deel in the Sun, Jennifer Jones, The Rebel Set.
ROYAL—Walt Disney's The Big Fisherman—Story of Simon Peter.

Besides the Fox, separate seating for blacks was offered in other houses including the Municipal Auditorium, Loew's Grand, the Capitol, the Buckhead, and the Roxy, its rear entrance shown here.



Local black newspapers decried black patronization of galleries in white theatres (in favor of black-operated venues) but to no avail, for there was nowhere else to see first-run films. This Atlanta Independent cartoon of 1921 depicts the back way into the Loew's Grand, terming the traitors "alley bats."



White Atlanta Society could not conceive of integrated facilities, for the only black people they knew were their own servants. To illustrate their thinking, here is the 1947 program proof red-lined by the Junior League to eliminate the word "Negro" in favor of "slave." In the final version, the dance was referred to as "Moorish," to match the decor of the theatre.

TUESDAY EVENING, APRIL 29, 1947, AT 8 O'CLOCK

AIDA

(IN ITALIAN) (GIUSEPPE VERDI)

THE KING	PHILIP KINSMAN
AMNERIS	BLANCHE THEBOM
AIDA	<i>Flora Kim</i> DANIZA ILITSCH
RADAMES	KURT BAUM
RAMFIS	NICOLA MOSCONA
AMONASRO	LEONARD WARREN
A MESSENGER	LODOVICO OLIVIERO
A PRIESTESS	THELMA VOTIPKA

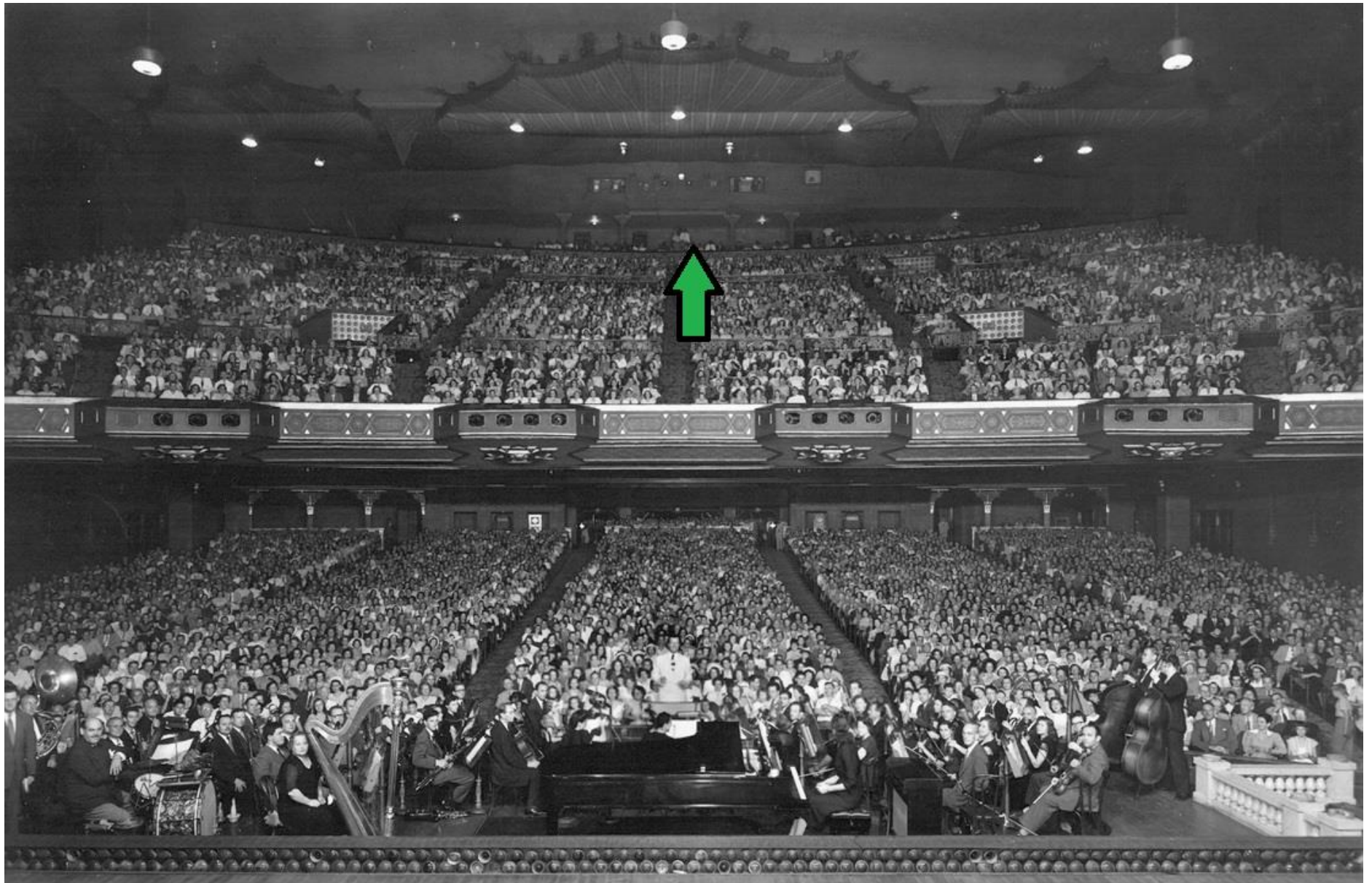
ACT I: Scene 2—"Temple dance"—The ballet
ACT II: Scene 1—"Negro dance"—A ballet group
ACT II: Scene 2—"Triumphal dance"—

CONDUCTOR	CESARE SODERO
STAGE DIRECTOR	DESIRE DEFRERE
CHORUS MASTER	KURT ADLER
CHOREOGRAPHY BY	BORIS ROMANOFF

EXCLUSIVELY

Slave

The colored gallery at the Fox was referred to in-house as “Nigger Heaven” (green arrow) and is shown below during a free Atlanta Pops concert in 1945.



The capstan winch at the Fox used to haul up the Met scenery was called a "nigger head" and Channon of Chicago held the patent, below.

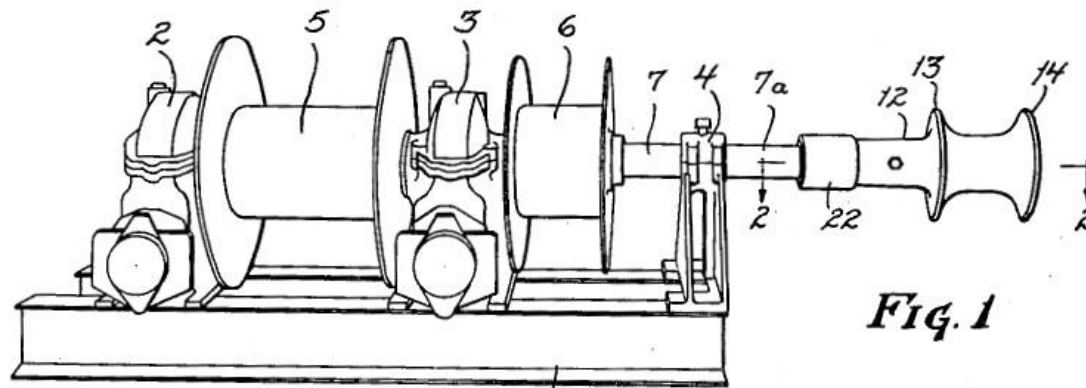
May 9, 1939.

H. J. TROCHE

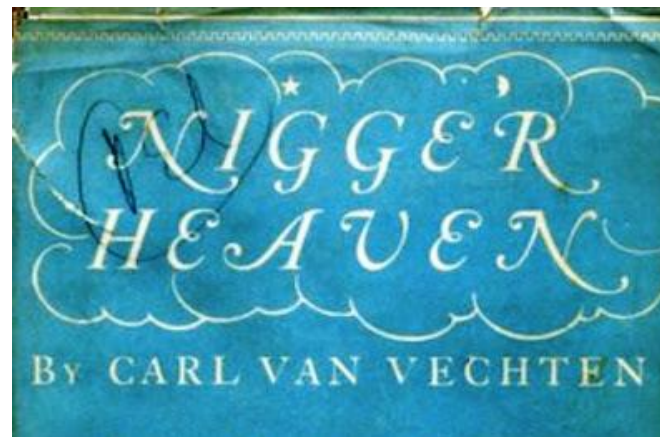
2,157,153

NIGGERHEAD

Filed Aug. 14, 1936



"Nigger heaven" was also the title of a 1926 best-selling novel about Harlem.



To desegregate the Fox on a permanent basis, the scheme hit upon by an Atlanta civil rights group was to force the Fox to turn away "test" black patrons. The group could then appeal directly to the Met in New York-- which they immediately did.

ATLANTA JOURNAL 5/04/1961

Two Negroes Barred From Dress Circle

Two well-dressed Negro women appeared at the Fox Theater just after opera curtain time Wednesday evening with tickets to seats in the dress circle. They were refused admission there.

Their appearance seemed to be part of a campaign of protest against the exclusion of Negroes from various sections of the theater audience.

Four Negroes with balcony tickets arrived Tuesday evening for opera. They accepted substitute seats and were not seated alongside white patrons. Wednesday night's would-be opera-goers declined such accommodations.

* * *

NEWSPAPERS were advised by telephone Wednesday afternoon that two Negroes holding dress circle seats would attempt to attend the evening performance.

A Fox Theater official conducted the pair Wednesday evening to the box office, where they telephoned Lee Evans, president of the Atlanta Board of Aldermen. They protested that they were "humiliated."

Mr. Evans said Thursday he received such a call, and that he explained that the Fox Theater is rented for the occasion by the Atlanta Music Festival Association.

The incident brought to light the fact that not even the colored section was available for colored people. (article excerpt).

ATLANTA CONSTITUTION 5/31/61

Negroes View Opera, Sit in Special Area

Members of the Junior League of Atlanta, in charge of opera ticket sales, said a section previously reserved for Negro patrons was made available several seasons ago to whites because there had not been enough Negro ticket purchasers.

Bing summarily passed the ball back to the Atlanta protesters, claiming the Met "has nothing whatsoever to do with the local [theatre] arrangements" and that their telegram was "based on insufficient knowledge of the facts."

ATLANTA JOURNAL 5/06/1961

Don't Control Seating, Opera's Bing Tells King

By FRANK DANIEL

General Manager Rudolf Bing, of the Metropolitan Opera Association, replying to a telegram from Rev. Martin Luther King, Atlanta integration leader, suggested Friday that Mr. King acted "on insufficient knowledge of the facts."

In two seemingly planned incidents, Negroes holding tickets to seats in the orchestra and dress circle sections of the Fox Theater, where the Met is performing during Atlanta's 1961 opera week, were not seated in their places.

On Tuesday evening, four Negroes, arriving via the theater's "colored entrance," presented tickets for seats in a downstairs section of the theater. When told they could not occupy the seats, they accepted chairs specially placed for them in another section of the house.

Wednesday evening two Negro women, with orchestra section seats, were denied admission at the main entrance.

The presumably provoked incidents drew prompt protests, addressed to Met officials in Atlanta.

Mr. Bing's reply follows:

"Atlanta

"May 5, 1961

"The Rev. Martin Luther King
The Southern Christian Leadership Conference
208 Auburn Avenue, NE
Atlanta, Georgia

"Dear. Mr. King:

"This is in reply to your telegram of this date. My assistant manager, Mr. Francis Robinson, and I are also in receipt of telegrams, also with reference to the incidents to which you refer, from Edward B. King Jr., administrative secretary of the Student Non-Violent Committee, but cannot reply since he gives us no address and we have been unable to obtain one.

"I am afraid you are basing your assumptions on insufficient knowledge of the facts. The Metropolitan Opera does not, as you suggest, allow itself to be dictated to by anyone. We perform in Atlanta under an agreement with the Atlanta Music Festival Association. Our sole responsibility under that agreement is the production of a certain number of opera performances, and the Atlanta Music Festival Association provides the Fox Theater for these performances. We have nothing whatsoever to do with the local arrangements, which are completely and entirely handled by the Atlanta Music Festival Association, by the Junior League of Atlanta, and the management of the Fox Theater. In New York City, where we control our own house, no distinction is made in the admission of patrons.

"At such a critical moment of history, to use another of your phrases, I think my personal and official viewpoint speaks for itself. It is a matter of record and it has been acknowledged. Perhaps you are unaware that I am the recipient of an award from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

"Yours very truly,

"Rudolf Bing."

Three weeks later Bing, still on tour and "playing to packed, integrated audiences in Detroit" was inspired to flip-flop, and his decision made front page news in The New York Times (excerpt).

NEW YORK TIMES 5/24/1961

Segregated Halls Ruled Out by 'Met' For Its 1962 Tour

By DAMON STETSON

Special to The New York Times.

DETROIT, May 23—The Metropolitan Opera Association will no longer play to segregated audiences in the South, according to Rudolf Bing, general manager.

The new policy of the Metropolitan was disclosed by Mr. Bing in answer to a question at a news conference here today. The opera is playing to packed, unsegregated audiences in Detroit this week.

Mr. Bing made the announcement after he had been asked a question about the Metropolitan's policy in view of present tensions in Montgomery, Ala., and other sections of the South.

"The time has come," Mr. Bing said, "when the Metropolitan Opera can no longer play to segregated audiences and we have so advised our friends in Atlanta and Dallas, which are the two Southern cities on the 1962 Metropolitan tour."

A week later, the Fox wanted out of its lease.

ATLANTA JOURNAL 5/30/1961

'Race No Factor' On Opera Tickets

**First Come, First Served, Bing Told;
Theater Wants Out on Met Lease**

6. The Fox Theater, where the Met has appeared since 1947, wishes to discontinue its policy of leasing the theater to the festival association.

James M. Harrison, in a letter to Mr. Dick, pointed out that the original lease was based on a three-day opera season, which has now grown to a week. The lease was based on the provision that opera be presented at the Fox Theater on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, the part of the week when movie attendance is smaller than toward the later part of the week.

But by July, an understanding was reached with the Fox, likely due to the intercession of Mayor Hartsfield, who wanted a city "too busy to hate."

ATLANTA CONSTITUTION 7/25/1961

Integrated Crowds To View Met Here

By BRUCE GALPHIN

The Atlanta Music Festival Association announced Monday it has made arrangements to bring grand opera here next year under the non-segregated seating policy demanded by the Metropolitan Opera Association.

The statement, released by festival association president Jackson P. Dick Jr., said:

"The Atlanta Music Festival Association, the Fox Theater and the Metropolitan Opera Co. have reached agreement whereby grand opera, barring any national labor troubles, will be back in Atlanta next year for the week beginning Monday, April 30, for six evening performances and one Saturday matinee.

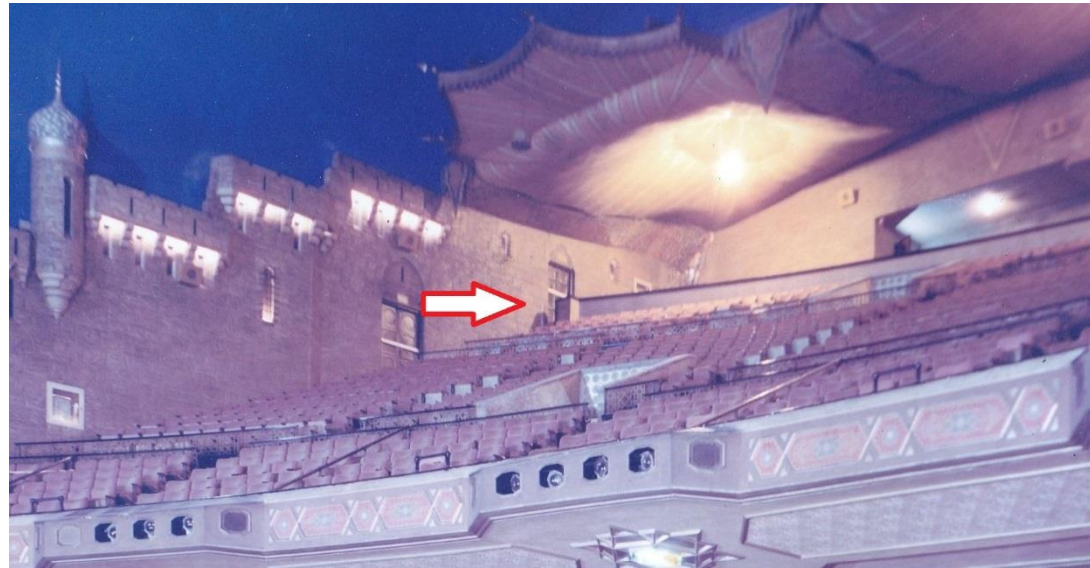
"The Fox Theater has agreed at the request of the City of Atlanta, to make its theater available, since there is no other place adequate to present opera.

"Under the agreement, the policy and management of the theater during Opera Week, will be under the Music Festival Association. The festival association has acceded to the request of the Metropolitan Opera Company that all performances be on a non-segregated basis.

"As in the past, the Atlanta Junior League will handle the sale of tickets under the general policies set by the Atlanta Music Festival Association.

"The Atlanta music festival desires to thank the Fox Theater management for its generosity and civic spirit in agreeing to allow the use of the Fox Theater at some inconvenience and financial sacrifice."

In May of 1962, the "Colored Entrance" sign was retired, and cuts were made left and right in the Great Wall (arrow). For the first time, the Gallery was accessible via the patron elevators.



The audience for the April, 1962 season opener "Elektra" "was the first integrated one."

ATLANTA CONSTITUTION 5/11/1962

The Met Invades Atlanta In an Elektrifying Night

"This is one of the highlights of our year," said E. F. Slider of Jacksonville, Fla.

"My wife and I have been coming to Atlanta for opera week for 10 or 12 years now. We formerly lived here, and we kept our season ticket so we always come back."

Despite the crowds and the excitement, the whole thing went "extremely smoothly," according to Fox assistant manager Frank Pittman.

Some 125 extra ushers from Georgia Tech and Emory ushered guests to their seats. Lee Jones, business manager of the Georgia

Tech Glee Clubs, directed the ushers, and said he had few problems.

"Except," he said, "please tell everyone to let an usher seal them. Tonight we had to move about three rows of people right at curtain time."

The audience was the first integrated one to attend a Met performance in Atlanta. In the past Negroes have generally attended in special sections.

By the time the opera left town, the City of Atlanta announced the desegregation of all the downtown movie houses, that "two Negroes each week would be admitted to each of the four downtown theatres until June 1, 1962, after which there will be no restriction."

ATLANTA JOURNAL 5/15/1962

NEGROES ATTEND ATLANTA THEATERS

At Least 2 Downtown Movies
Start Controlled Desegregation Plan

By FRED POWLEDGE

Downtown Atlanta theaters were integrated Monday by small groups of Negroes taking part in a controlled desegregation program.

No significant incidents were reported.

Operators of the theaters themselves, and the Negro representatives with whom they dealt, both refused to comment on the desegregation. But it was learned from authoritative sources that the plan did go into effect Monday.

According to an agreement reached last December by the theater people and the Negro leaders, the four downtown theaters were to start the controlled desegregation process after May 5.

It was not learned immediately whether all four of the theaters accepted Negroes Monday. But at least two of them did.

THE THEATERS are the Rialto, where "Experiment in Terror" was showing; Loew's which showed "Judgment at Nuremberg"; the Fox, where "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance" was playing, and the Roxy, featuring a movie made in Savannah, "Cape Fear."

The agreement, negotiated in secret over the past several months, provides that two Negroes each week would be admitted to each of the four downtown theaters until June 1.

After June 1 there would be no restrictions on the Negro patrons. A similar plan would go into effect

after June 1 at the suburban theaters.

* * *

WHILE the original date of the controlled plan's inauguration was set for "after the Metropolitan Opera leaves" (May 5), Negro groups waited a week before starting their program.

This resulted in the inadvertent desegregation of one theater, the Rialto, on May 6.

An Atlanta Negro, who was not a party to the negotiations but who had heard about the plan through word-of-mouth discussion, decided to go to the motion-picture house on that Sunday, thinking it would be desegregated.

While the theater was not expecting the Negro, it sold him a ticket without question and he took his seat, he said. He said he left the theater after about 30 minutes because "it wasn't my sort of movie."

However, by the simple expedient of being sold out in perpetuity, the Association effectively barred all the 4,600 Fox nightly opera tickets from purchase by Negroes. The opera seating crunch was exacerbated in 1964, when declining motion picture revenue led the Fox to install larger "luxury" seats in the orchestra section, thus reducing its capacity by 528 seats and wreaking havoc for the Junior League ticket ladies.



For the 1968 season, Mayor Ivan Allen “succeeded in prying loose 200 tickets to be sold predominately to negroes.” Both the Mayor’s wife and daughter-in-law were Junior League.

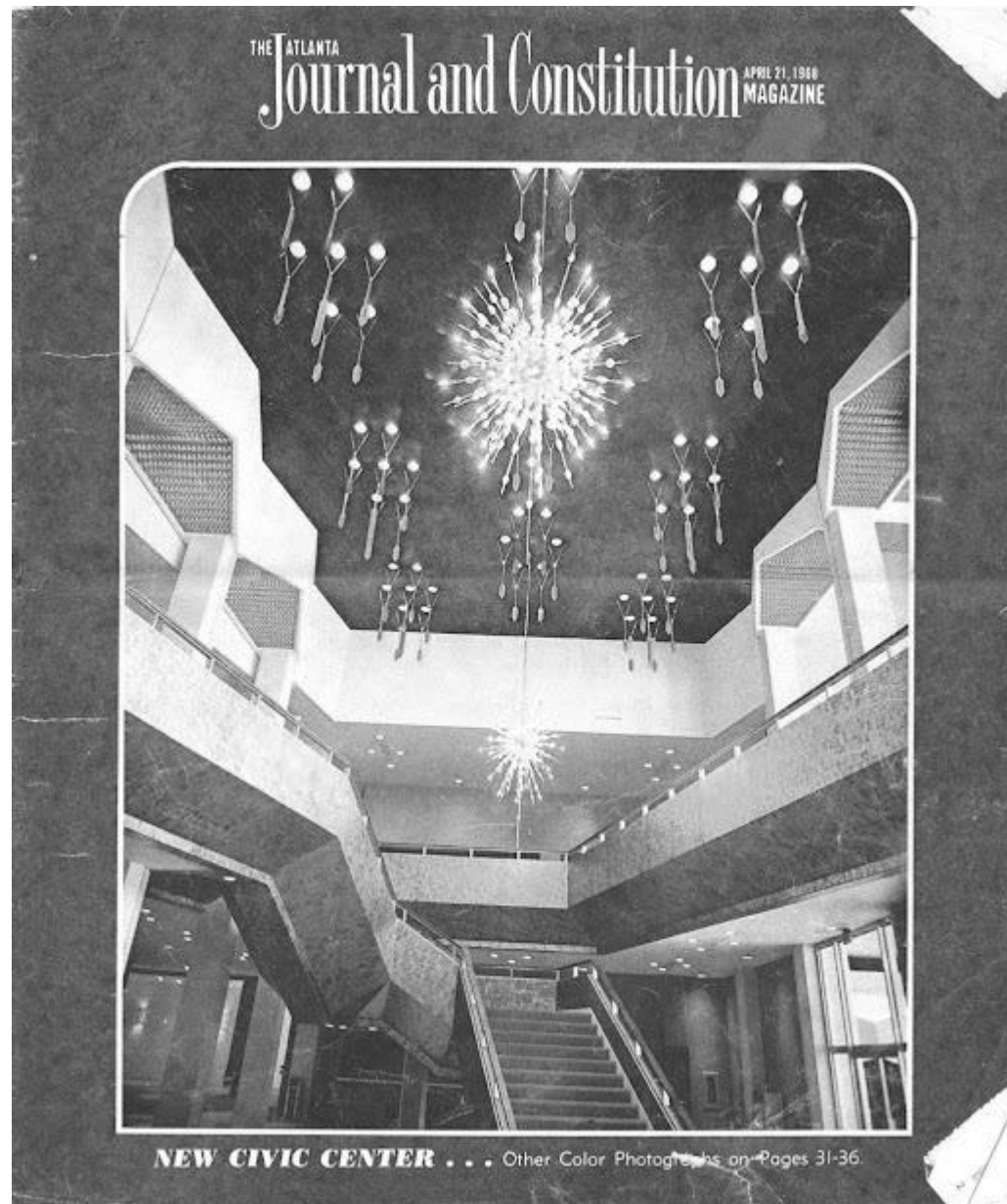
This year Mayor Ivan Allen Jr. succeeded, against obstacles, in prying loose 200 tickets to be sold primarily to Negroes if they wanted them. The demand soon took all of them. Since for many years Negroes did not find opera tickets available here and consequently were not among those with priorities because of past purchases, this act was a necessity to help end a system of real, if no longer intended, discrimination. Mayor Allen had to go directly to Mr. Bing to get this done.

ATLANTA CONSTITUTION 5/10/1968

Seeking a permanent solution, the Mayor built a new theatre, specifically to match the original Fox seating capacity of 4,646, but falling short by 164. Construction of the Civic Center was rushed and opened in time for the 1967 season, but Bing refused even to look it until a full year later.



Bowing to the inevitable, the Met departed the Fox for the 1969 season. The new and starkly modern venue was miles from Peachtree Street and the convenience of the Georgian Terrace Hotel.



In his autobiography, Bing recounts a story: "[In Atlanta during 'Tosca'] a little black boy had somehow got into the orchestra section, and was being pushed out by an usher. I took him by the hand and told him that if he wanted to listen, he could stand in the aisle just by the door. He went in, and after about three minutes, he came out and said, very politely, 'Thank you. I've had enough.' I thought to myself, 'This race will go far...'"

Sixty years later, there is no Met tour; there is no opera at the Fox; there is no Civic Center; and what opera there is plays in the suburbs.



###

To view the complete 1962 Junior League program book, [click here](#).

To view the 1964-1965 Junior League Directory, [click here](#).

To see a roster of all Met operas which played the Fox, [click here](#).

In 2015 the [Civic Center](#) ceased operations.

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"From opening day..." Photo by author.

"Black people entered..." Drawing annotated by author.
"Located next to the..." Photo left from web, right, by author.
"The gallery was physically..." Photo by Trevor Carr.
"The Gallery had..." Drawing courtesy, Theatre Historical Society
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"In 1986.." Photo Joe Patten collection.

Acknowledgements

Joe Patten, Patti Patten, Janice McDonald, IATSE Local 927 members Lee Freeman, Phil Hutcheson, and Cary Oldknow, John Tanner, Garry Motter, Caroline McCart Swaney, Michael Zande, Rick Zimmerman, and Helen Matthews of the Atlanta History Center. Thanks to the Theatre Historical Society.

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